

Message Text

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ACTION ACDA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-08 IO-04 ISO-00 AEC-05 CIAE-00 H-01 INR-05

L-01 NSAE-00 OIC-01 OMB-01 PA-01 PM-03 PRS-01 SAJ-01

SAM-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 RSC-01 NSC-05

DODE-00 DRC-01 /074 W

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R 151736Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3204

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO

USMISSION GENEVA

USMISSION USUN

USDEL SALT II GENEVA

USDEL MBFR VIENNA

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR

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GENEVA FOR USDEL CSCE

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USNMR/SHAPE AND USCINCEUR ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MNUC, MPOL, FR

S/BBJECT: FRENCH STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES - SSBN'S

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: FRANCE PLANS TO BUILD SIXTH SSBN.

END SUMMARY.

2. RELIABLE MOD SOURCES HAVE CONFIRMED TO US THAT FRANCE HAS DECIDED TO BUILD A SIXTH SSBN. DECISION WAS APPARENTLY TAKEN IN SPRING OF THIS YEAR AFTER THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT POMPIDOU BUT BEFORE THE ELECTION OF GISCARD D'ESTAING AS THE NEW PRESIDENT OF FRANCE. WE ARE TOLD IT IS UNLIKELY THAT GISCARD'S CURRENT DEFENSE REVIEW WILL CHANGE THIS DECISION.

3. FRANCE HAS THREE OPERATIONAL SSBN'S (ALTHOUGH ONE IS CURRENTLY IN BREST UNDERGOING OVERHAUL). A FOURTH WAS LAUNCHED SEPTEMBER 17 AND THE FIFTH IS SCHEDULED FOR LAUNCHING SOMETIME IN THE LATE 1970'S. WHILE WE DO NOT HAVE AN EXACT DATE FOR THE PLANNED LAUNCHING OF THE SIXTH BOAT, WE SUSPECT THAT IT WILL NOT BE BEFORE THE EARLY 1980'S.

4. MEANWHILE, FRANCE CONTINUES ITS PROGRAM TO IMPROVE THE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND WARHEADS CARRIED BY ITS SSBN FLEET. THE FIRST THERMONUCLEAR WARHEADS (CARRYING A ONE MEGATON CHARGE) WILL PROBABLY BE INSTALLED IN 1976. WE WOULD EXPECT THAT ALL OF FRANCE'S SSBN'S WOULD BE RE-EQUIPPED WITH THIS NEW WARHEAD AS THEY COME IN FOR REGULAR OVERHAUL AND RE-FIT THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE DECADE.

5. FRANCE HAS EXPERIMENTED WITH MINIATURIZED MRV'S AND HARDENED WARHEADS WHICH WE EXPECT EVENTUALLY TO REPLACE SOME -- OR ALL -- OF THE THERMONUCLEAR WARHEADS, PERHAPS IN THE 1980'S.

6. A SOURCE CLOSE TO FRENCH MOD SOUFFLET TOLD US RECENTLY THAT HE EXPECTS FRANCE WILL BUILD SEVERAL
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NUCLEAR POWERED ATTACK SUBMARINES AS WELL AS MORE THAN SIX SSBN'S, ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT PREPARED TO SPECULATE ON

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ACTION ACDA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-08 IO-04 ISO-00 AEC-05 CIAE-00 H-01 INR-05

L-01 NSAE-00 OIC-01 OMB-01 PA-01 PM-03 PRS-01 SAJ-01

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R 151736Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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A TOTAL FIGURE IN EITHER CATEGORY. HE SAID THAT THE CURRENT REVIEW OF FRANCE'S DEFENSE POLICY WAS SHOWING JUST HOW EXPENSIVE IT IS TO MAINTAIN CONVENTIONAL FORCES. FOR EXAMPLE, HE CITED THE FIGURE OF SEVEN BILLION FRENCH FRANCS AS THE TOTAL COST FOR EQUIPPING AND MAINTAINING A FRENCH MECHANIZED DIVISION. FROM A COST/EFFECTIVENESS STANDPOINT, HE CONCLUDED, FRANCE'S STRATEGY OF DETERRENCE WOULD BE BETTER SERVED BY INCREASING ITS MOST SURVIVABLE STRATEGIC FORCE (I.E., SSBN'S) WHILE REDUCING ITS CONVENTIONAL FORCES.

7. COMMENT: WE SUSPECT THAT THE OPTION OF SHIFTING FRANCE'S DEFENSE POSTURE TOWARD HEAVIER RELIANCE ON STRATEGIC (AND PERHAPS TACTICAL) NUCLEAR FORCES MUST SEEM A MOST ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO THE VERY HEAVY EXPENSES RELATED TO FRANCE'S CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE FORCES AT A TIME WHEN ECONOMIC RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR DEFENSE ARE UNLIKELY TO GROW IN REAL TERMS. MOREOVER, FRANCE'S SOUL SEARCHING OVER THE FUTURE TERMS OF SERVICE OF ITS CONSCRIPTS AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICEMEN IS LIKELY TO LEAD TO SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES IN THE PERSONNEL COST OF THE CONVENTIONAL FORCES (AND -- TO A PROPORTIONATELY LESSER DEGREE-- IN THE COST OF THE OTHER FORCES), WHICH MIGHT ARGUE FOR REDUCTIONS IN CONVENTIONAL MANPOWER. FINALLY, A REVISED FRENCH FORCE POSTURE EMPHASIZING NUCLEAR FORCES WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH FRANCE'S BASIC STRATEGIC CONCEPT DATING FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC.

IRWIN

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